

CITI Certification (Human Subjects)

Online training in Research Ethics
Required for anyone doing research on people.

Due Sept 16th

www.citiprogram.org

Interview Project

Choose a social question/topic that interests you

Interview at least 2 people about it (about 2 hours of interviewing)

Tape record it

Transcribe it

Analyze/Code the Transcript

Write a conceptually-driven paper

Avoiding Errors in Social Reasoning

How do people decide what to believe about the
social world?

Or

The Unscientific Method

Identity-Connections-Structural View of Social Knowledge

Institutions

Organizations

Identity

Family

Friends

A more rational actor view...

Life is confusing, complicated, and too short to figure it all out on our own.

We must rely on others to gather information for us, shape our world view.

So we trust in other's expertise instead of trying to become experts in everything.

But whom do we trust?

This mode of social inquiry errs because we are...

Defending our self/group esteem.

Reinforcing our shared world view.

Strengthening bonds through agreement.

Also, people just make errors, and these spread
through networks of communication and trust.

We all form social beliefs in un-
scientific ways...

But we can push back on our own conformist
tendencies.

We can be more skeptical of ourselves, more
agnostic and open-minded about social theories
and evidence that we don't want to agree with.

3 kinds of Truth

Generalizable

Measurement Validity

Causal Validity

Generalizability (Sample & External)

Is X really true for everybody and/or every situation?

Large Scale Surveys with Random Sampling best answer this.

Measurement Validity

Are we measuring what we think we're measuring?

In-Depth Qualitative Field Research is best able to deal with this.

Causal Validity

Is A really the cause of B?

Experiments best answer this question.

Generalizability

Is this really true for everyone?

Group Stereotypes from Faulty Generalizations

Rural White Midwesterners may only experience African Americans through TV, where they are disproportionately portrayed as violent criminals.

Many people only experience homelessness through panhandling and high-visibility street dwellers. But most homeless Americans are less visible, most are families or single women, and most are only homeless temporarily.

Journalists often over-generalize from their own lives, their colleagues lives, and the lives of wealthy famous people who dominate news.

The Opting Out Revolution: Rise in professional women choosing to be housewives. (quite the opposite, see Christine Percheski's work)

Big families in vogue again (maybe among a very small set of wealthy people).

Geographic Mobility is increasing. (very common belief, but not true)

Our own life experiences will never be generalizable

As individuals, we necessarily represent a specific demographic.

The people around us are likely to be similar to us in many ways.

Our perception of our own life and community are biased by our personal investment in them.

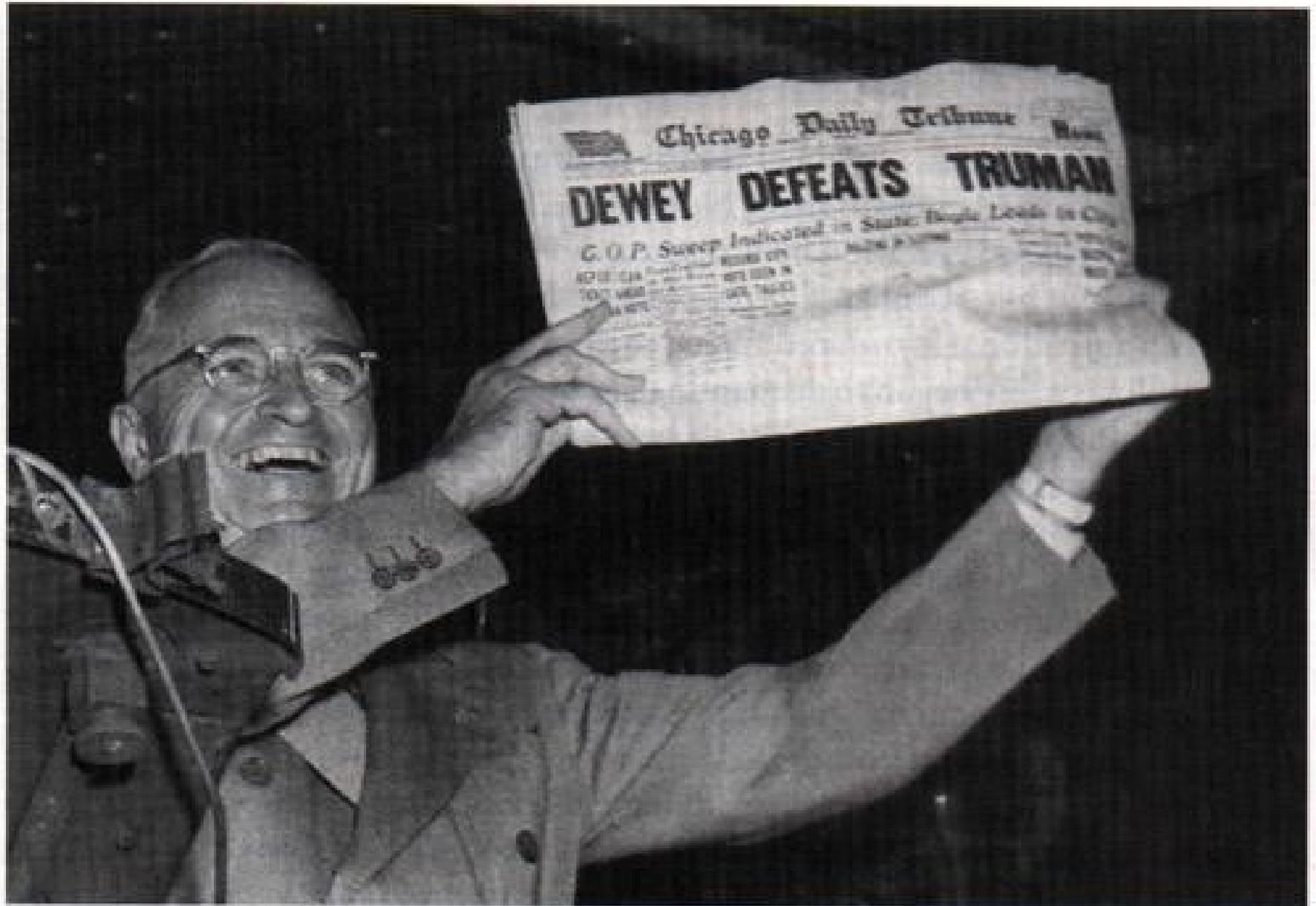
So remember that your own experiences are just one case among millions, and possibly unique.

Sampling

Talk to a small number of people, generalize to the population of people they come from.

Random Sampling is the key to this.

Dewey Wins



Measurement Validity

Are we really measuring what we think we're measuring?

Measurement Errors

Unreliable Self Measurements: "I actually drive better when I'm stoned..."

"Most Americans are not racist, according to a poll asking respondents if they themselves are racist."

Interviewer Effects: "Of course grown-ups believe in Santa: I asked my parents and aunt and uncle, and they all said he is real!"

Leading/Loaded Questions: "Nobody wants Socialized Health Care: we polled 1000 Americans and asked them if they want faceless government bureaucrats to decide if granny should be allowed to live, and 90% of them said no."

Disconnects between concept and measurement

People in the South are much nicer than people in New York City: they smile and say hello when you pass them on the street. They give more to charities, and volunteer more of their time.

New Yorkers are much nicer than Southerners. They vote to be taxed more for social services for those less fortunate, they fund public education better, and favor kinder immigration laws.

How do you measure “nice”?
(Operationalizing a Concept)

Is Derek Jeter a great short stop?



Measuring Short Stop-ness

What makes a Good Short Stop?

How often you get the guy out when you have a chance to.

But measuring chances is tricky...

Fielding Percentage uses errors as the chances you missed.

Range Factor ignores errors, and instead assumes chances average out to be a constant.

The Unreliability of Baseball Errors

Errors in baseball are decided by score keepers, who decide if the fielder should have gotten the out.

But short stops with less range may not get close to balls others would have a chance at, and thus get away with fewer errors despite letting more balls through.

Many baseball statisticians criticize Jeter's range, and use his low Range Factor as evidence of this.

Qualitative Research and Measurement Validity

Causal Validity

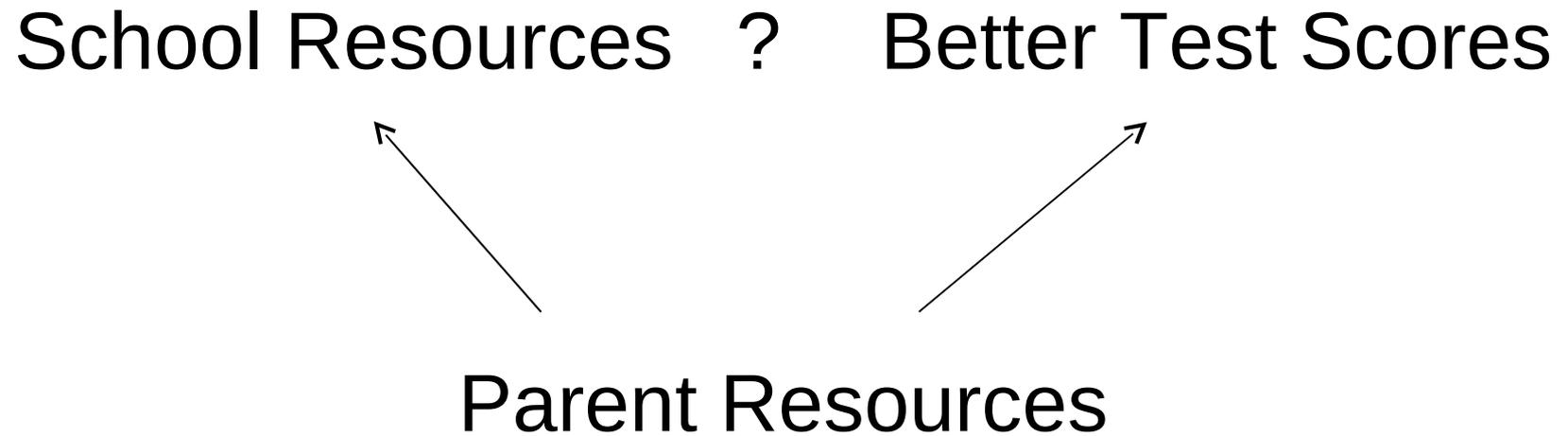
How do we know if one thing really causes another?

School Resources



Better Test Scores

Spurious Causality



The Fundamental Attribution Error

Aka Correspondence Bias

Tendency to explain observations of others as intrinsic to them, while contextualizing observations about oneself.

My disorganization is because I'm in a hectic week.

Her disorganization is because she's messy.

Experiments are all about Causal Validity

Keep everything the same except for X and Y

Change X for one group, see if Y changes

The Scientific Method of Acquiring Knowledge

Theories of how the World Works



Hypotheses: Falsifiable Statements.



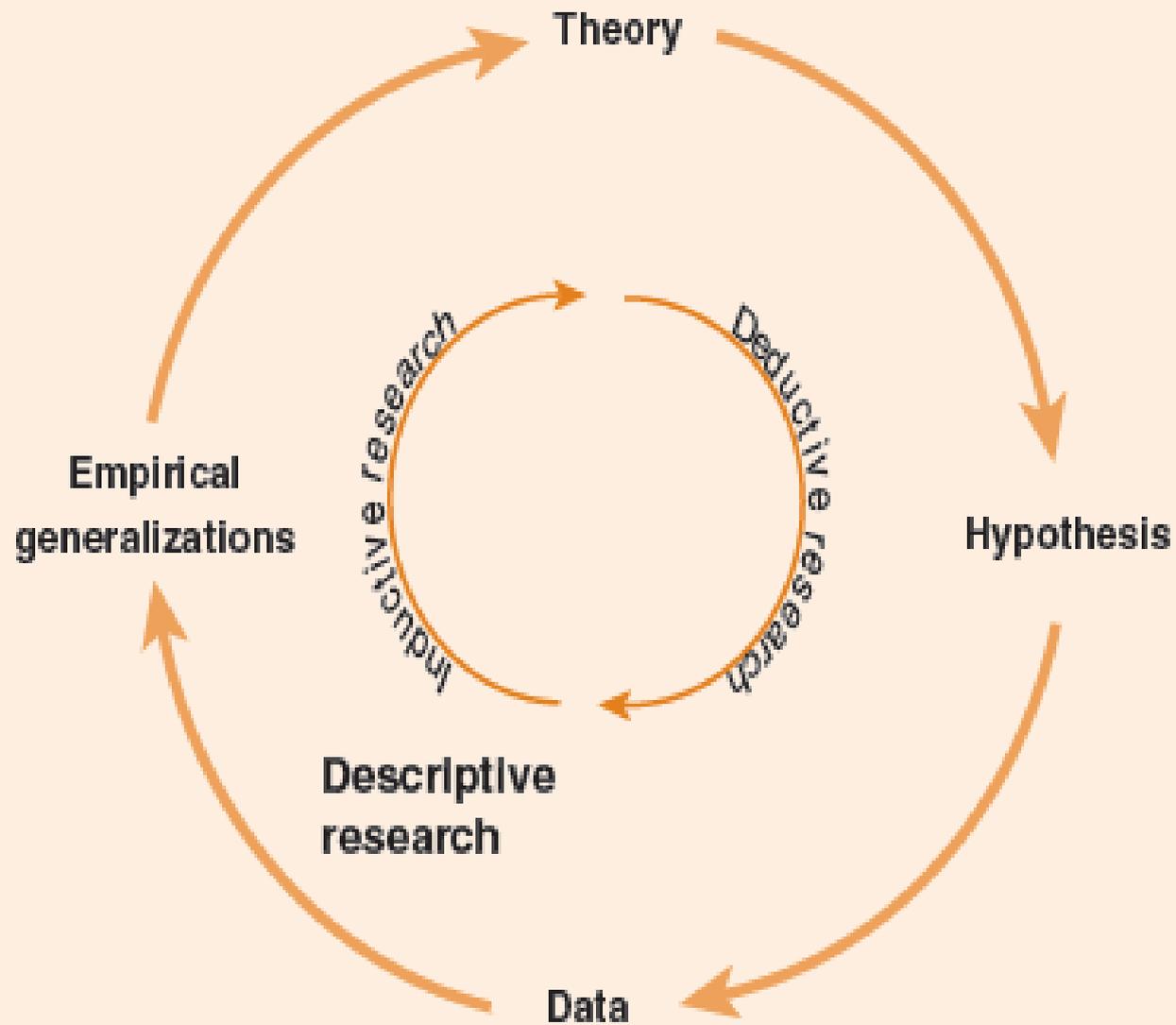
Falsified?
Revise Theory



Supported?
Look for more evidence

EXHIBIT 2.2

The Research Circle



Hypotheses connect theories to specifics in the real world

Abstract



Specific

Theory



Hypothesis

Theories are General, Hypotheses more immediately Testable

Theory: Increasing availability of solitary entertainment options erodes social capital.



Hypothesis: People spend less time with their friends after purchasing a home gaming system.

(testable = falsifiable)

Falsification

No amount of experimentation can ever prove me right; a single experiment can prove me wrong.

Albert Einstein

What is the theory?

- A **theory** is a logically interrelated set of propositions that helps us make sense of many interrelated phenomena and predict behavior or attitudes that are likely to occur when certain conditions are met.

Theories are like maps of the world

They tell us what to expect.

They make predictions.

When you see X, expect to see Y.

They explain the world.

But unlike maps, theories are
general

They aren't meant to be about specific events or things.

They're about broad categories of things, and how they're related.

A theory shouldn't be about New York, but it might be about large urban areas.

A theory won't say “Bloomberg will cut funding to the arts” but one could be about the vulnerability of public arts funding in recessionary times.

Functionalist Theory of Compensation:
People are paid based on their usefulness to
society.

Hypothesis: People who perform the same work
for the same company will be paid the same
regardless of educational differences.

Labelling Theory of Deviance: Being labeled as a deviant creates behavior that reinforces the label.

Hypothesis: Teachers who avoid labeling students as troublemakers will elicit more compliance than those who do.

Hypothesis: Parolees who are told that they are “cured” will be less likely to offend again.

Hypothesis: Well-behaved students can be sent on a path of deviance merely by being told that they are troublemakers by their teachers.

What is a good research question?

Not the same as a theory.

Its what you want to study.

But framing it as a scientific research question
isn't always obvious.

What makes a research question “good”?

Feasibility: Can you start and finish an investigation with available resources and in the time allotted?

Social importance: Will the answer make a difference in the social world, even if it only helps people understand a problem?

Scientific relevance: Does your question help resolve some contradictory research findings or a puzzling issue in social theory?

I think a good research question is:

Positive (Not Normative): Its about what is, not what should be. Not "Is program X a good thing?" but maybe "What are the effects of program X?"

General: It aims at generalizable knowledge, not about just one specific instance.

Focused: Could be one relationship between variables, could be 1 social process, etc. Not something like "I want to understand poverty."

Feasible: It is testable with a reasonable budget and time frame

Not a good research question...

Why are people from the South so messed up?

How are Southerners different from other U.S. people?

Are there personality differences between the South and other U.S. regions?

How is personality tied to regional cultural differences?

Why do people have to be so stupid all the time?

Why do people honk their car horns outside my apartment at 6am when it doesn't do a bit of good?

Do different people, professions, and (sub)cultures use the car horn in different ways?

Are street vendors ripping me off?

How does the economy of street vending work?